



DIVREI MENACHEM

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Parents Take Note!

This week's Parsha contains a plethora of mitzvot designed to protect family and social relationships in the new community in Eretz Yisrael. Now Bnei Yisrael will have to learn to live among themselves, respect justice, maintain their moral fiber, and take care of each other in matters related to civic life.

Notably, the Parsha opens with the topic of the beautiful captive woman whom the captor desires. Then, after the restrictions of that issue are recorded, the Parsha discusses inheritance, where a younger son is favored over the firstborn.

Then the matter of the wayward son, “disobedient and recalcitrant,” is raised as another topic where the relationship between father and son is critical. In the former case, the father sees his firstborn as his inheritor, continuing to support the family. In the latter instance, the father sees his son as a glutton and drunkard who will ultimately squander his wealth (Sanhedrin 72a) – and possibly, he is the offspring of that captive woman!

Surprisingly, the parents must bring their delinquent son to the elders for judgment, even though close relatives are generally forbidden as witnesses. The Talmud

relates, however, that the *totality* of the many criteria by which the child could be put to death never occurred and will never be realized in practice.

For example, the son must have *just reached* adolescence when he is most susceptible to awakening tendencies. Furthermore, both parents must concur that “our son does not listen to *our* voice” after they chastised him in front of three people. Moreover, Rashi comments that the rebellious son is not subject to the death penalty until (a) he proves to be a thief and (b) consumes an excessive and defined amount of flesh and drink in one meal.

These seemingly unfeasible conditions do not take away from the Torah's intent. The implication (reinforced in the next Passuk that talks of a man deserving of the death penalty) is that sooner or later, the “rebellious son” will commit deeds deserving of capital punishment (ibid 71b, 72a).

Rabbi Hirsch sees in these lines a paramount lesson. Responsible for their children's education, parents must work in harmony, be consistent, treat their offspring with dignity, and promote values that negate the overriding prominence of “food and drink.” Today, in our open society, where individualistic notions and entitlement are so prevalent, these words appear more appropriate than ever. ■

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